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Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

INDEX

RITCHIE BROTHERS AUCTIONEERS CALLS SASKATCHEWAN HOME **07-33-154**

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE A DEPOSIT IN THE CARBON BANK? **07-33-155**

NATURAL FIBRE PRODUCTS IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT SASKATOON SHOW **07-33-156**

SASKATCHEWAN HORSE INDUSTRY IS DEVELOPING VALUE **07-33-157**

WILL PRAIRIE TREES SURVIVE OUR CHANGING CLIMATE? **07-33-158**

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Week of August 13, 2007

RITCHIE BROTHERS AUCTIONEERS CALLS SASKATCHEWAN HOME

Ritchie Brothers Auctioneers, an auction company with a global reach, now calls Saskatchewan home for their agriculture sector. The grand opening of the permanent Ritchie Brothers auction facility in Saskatoon took place on July 8.

Although the company has been in this facility since November 3, 2006, it was not completed at the time. Their first auction in Saskatchewan at the partially completed facility was held on April 11, and they set the record for the largest agriculture equipment sale in Canadian history. Well over 5,000 people were in attendance, and more than 3,000 placed bids.

Les Harding, the Regional Operations Manager for Ritchie Brothers, says the company's brand name and popularity are growing.

"We are at a point now where we have outgrown the facility even though we have only had two sales in it," Harding stated. "Now, we are beginning an expansion."

The company will be taking down the fence and pouring concrete, increasing the size of the display and consigned equipment lots by 10 acres, and expanding the parking facilities by four acres. The increased space will allow customers easier access. Additional bleacher-style seating will also be installed.

"We're building off of our success," Harding said. "We have already established a record and are excited for what the future holds."

Ritchie Brothers Auctioneers started to get more involved in the agriculture sector in Western Canada approximately four years ago. They made several acquisitions in Saskatchewan, including two small auction companies in the southeastern portion of the province and another in the Rouleau area.

After rolling into the agriculture division and realizing the potential market opportunities, the company decided it needed a facility to act as a hub for the agricultural portion of their operations. After investigating the options, they decided to locate their facility in the Saskatoon area.

According to Harding, this facility has great benefits for Saskatchewan producers.

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"A big way in which we will benefit Saskatchewan producers is the fact that our employees are a staffed and managed Saskatchewan group. We understand the market, and we understand producers' needs. We also understand the province's daily, weekly and monthly economic status," he said.

"Also, the space at the new facility allows farmers who are looking to do complete dispersals the chance to bring in their entire equipment lines. It definitely gives them a platform to showcase their equipment."

Harding says the next auction will take place in late fall or early winter. Once confirmed, the auction date will be announced and posted to their website at www.rbauction.com.

Producers can expect to find a wide range of equipment on the block, including late-model combines, four-wheel-drive, front-wheel-assisted dual-drive tractors, balers, air drills and seeders, and spray equipment.

"Really, all equipment used in the process of farming will be available, and, as the market grows, we will include items such as pick-up trucks, grain trucks, tractor trailers and semis," Harding said.

- 30 -

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ARE YOU READY TO MAKE A DEPOSIT IN THE CARBON BANK?

The talk of global warming and greenhouse gases may seem a complex and distant scientific equation. But there is one simple truth: pasture land can be an important method to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is captured by plants and stored as carbon in plant tissue, particularly the roots and, ultimately, in the soil. If there is a net carbon gain on a piece of land, it has become a carbon sink.

"All the tame and native pasture land in Saskatchewan could be classed as a large terrestrial carbon sink," said Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Forage Development Specialist Todd Jorgenson. "In fact, the soil we farm today is a result of the buildup of organic matter under native rangelands over the past thousands of years. Before agricultural settlement in Saskatchewan, there was a net carbon sink in these rangelands."

It all works like a bank account. The plants in the pasture lands take in carbon dioxide and sequester it, making carbon deposits. However, carbon is also released during the plants' dormant periods, and from soil respiration. In the past, management practices have caused a long-term net loss of carbon from the account, due to both cultivation of native grasslands and overgrazing.

"It is well documented that overgrazed rangeland can be a major carbon emitter," Jorgenson said. Growing conditions also affect the carbon balance of rangelands. Periods of drought and other poor growing conditions can cause net carbon loss.

"Well managed, healthy rangelands are a net carbon sink," Jorgenson added. "Management practices aimed at increasing ground cover and biomass production substantially increase the amount of carbon sequestered by pasture land."

Increasing net carbon sequestration across Saskatchewan's vast grazing land has the potential to make a significant contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gases in Saskatchewan. There may be potential in the future for producers to benefit from this land, in the form of carbon credits now being purchased and traded on a global market through the Chicago Climate Exchange.

Jorgenson says Saskatchewan pasture land managers can benefit either way.

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"The same practices that improve plant growth and overall rangeland health are the practices that hold the potential to increase long-term soil carbon sequestration," he stated. "The amount of carbon input into the soil depends on many management factors, such as litter and residue management, planting well-adapted species, and reducing overgrazing."

Jorgenson credits producers with understanding these concepts and progressing towards making Saskatchewan part of the solution for greenhouse gas reduction.

"Producers managing rangelands in the province are well aware of the benefits of good range management from a forage perspective," he said. "They should also be aware of the fact that they are removing greenhouse gases for the benefit of society."

- 30 -

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NATURAL FIBRE PRODUCTS IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT SASKATOON SHOW

Saskatchewan's natural fibre producers will stage their largest public showcase ever during the upcoming "Saskatchewan indemand 2007" trade show in Saskatoon.

The show was conceived and developed by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and Prairieland Park as an opportunity for entrepreneurs to promote their Saskatchewan-made products and services.

"Saskatchewan indemand 2007" will take place September 14 to 16 at Prairieland Park. Along with the trade fair, it will offer educational sessions with keynote speakers highlighting the steps necessary to become a successful marketer of Saskatchewan products, including the stories of those who have already developed new businesses.

The natural fibre sector will be offering a virtual show-within-a-show, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's Tara Jaboeuf. It will be called "Fibre inDemand, Naturally!"

"There's a whole bunch of different producers who got together and created this brand around natural fibres," Jaboeuf said. "We have different industry groups from alpacas, sheep, llamas, rabbits, goats and flax. It's our own little area and our own little specialty, showcasing what we do with fibre."

Displays will be provided by both industry groups and individual producers, including some 20 individual booths and a large demonstration area.

"For example, they will bring fleeces and then show knitting, spinning and weaving with wool," Jaboeuf said. "They're going to have some sales at the booths in the trade show, and do some demonstrations both at the booths and in the demonstration area."

Lynn Hilderman, an alpaca producer who operates Country Vista Alpacas near Duval, is co-ordinating a fibre product competition that will be held during the show.

"Anybody who has a product made of at least 70 per cent natural fibre can enter their work in the competition," Hilderman said. "We have categories for individual artisans, mills or commercial operations, guilds and two different youth age groups."

Hilderman says the competition and displays will showcase the full spectrum of skills and uses for fibre.

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"Spinning, dyeing, hand-knitting, machine-knitting, crocheting, hand-weaving, sewing manufactured material, artwork and felting will all be judged," she noted. "We're hoping that, with the involvement of the different industries, we can have a good turnout and really show Saskatchewan people the diversity and opportunities in the fibre industry."

Emerging products developed from flax fibre will also be on display, including recently created industrial applications, some of which will be seen for the first time.

"Saskatchewan indemand 2007" and "Fibre inDemand, Naturally!" are not only a showcase for the public, but an important opportunity for current and future entrepreneurs to meet, network and explore new business opportunities.

"People will talk with different associations and trading partners to see what they can do about selling, buying, and dealing with Saskatchewan products," Jaboeuf said.

The show will also be seen by an important national audience. The Economic Developers Association of Canada is holding its annual meeting in Saskatoon at the same time, and delegates will be chartered to Praireland Park to view the exhibits and demonstrations.

Prairieland Park is still accepting exhibitors to "Saskatchewan indemand." Anyone interested should contact Prairieland or visit their website at www.saskatoonex.com for details.

- 30 -

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SASKATCHEWAN HORSE INDUSTRY IS DEVELOPING VALUE

"The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man."
-Winston Churchill

This quotation is a favourite of Jim Graham, Livestock Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food in Swift Current. Graham works closely with the Saskatchewan Horse Federation to identify training and market development opportunities, and speaks passionately about the investment in time and money that is required to produce horses for the widely varied demands of the modern market.

The Saskatchewan herd is approximately 100,000 animals. The horse industry is comprised of a large number of small operators, perhaps as many as 10,000, according to Graham. The largest herds might number 200 animals, while there are many small acreage owners who are raising only two or three horses for their personal use. The vast majority of the Saskatchewan herd are quarter horses, which are popular both for working and riding. Graham says a growing segment of the horse industry is drawing business from the urban centres.

"Many people find a leisurely ride on a well-mannered horse to be good therapy, and they prefer that to going to the lake or other recreational pursuits," he stated. "Most potential horse owners want a well-broke animal that won't scare easily."

As a result, the industry is seeing more full-service stables that keep, feed and train horses, and provide paddock space or show areas for the horse owners.

The market for Saskatchewan horses is strong in both Alberta and Montana, and Graham is working to get equine entrepreneurs the recognition and the returns they deserve. In any given year, some 5,000 to 10,000 working horses are sold in the province.

Graham says that having a reputation for quality is an important factor in running a successful operation. A trained horse represents a sizeable investment by the owner. A raw colt is worth $1,000 or more. That value is influenced by the genetics and the performance of the dam and sire. The reputation of the trainer, and the ability of the horse to perform, can add value to the horse.

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"The cost of hiring a professional to turn that raw colt into a dependable mount can be as much as $500 per month for up to six months," he said. "Then there will be the daily feed and other health and care costs that can amount to $1,000 per year. There will be a marketing cost for advertising and auction fees that could be $300 or more. What's a three-year-old well-trained horse worth? To cover costs and provide a reasonable profit, the value could exceed $5,000."

"If you ever have the opportunity to attend a horse sale, appreciate the time and effort it has taken to get this equine athlete to this stage in its career," he said. "We should learn to appreciate the business acumen that is needed to meet the challenges and enjoy the fruits of the industry."

Information on breeding, raising, and training horses, as well as the many competitive opportunities, is available from the Saskatchewan Horse Federation at www.saskhorse.ca.

- 30 -

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WILL PRAIRIE TREES SURVIVE OUR CHANGING CLIMATE?

Trees across Western Canada are struggling to adapt to rising temperatures and volatile weather. With extreme weather projected to become more common, the result could leave many prairie trees with a grim future.

Now, 60 years after it began researching tree improvements and more than a century after first distributing trees on the prairies, Saskatchewan's Shelterbelt Centre is taking on the challenge of global warming.

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)-Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) Shelterbelt Centre was established in 1901 with the purpose of providing settlers with trees and shrubs to protect their homesteads from the harsh prairie winters.

Trees were needed to break up the strong winds and to retain crucial soil moisture, but the harsh prairie climate was demolishing the European-bred seedlings that settlers tried to plant.

"Original settlers came with trees from their own countries. These trees turned out to be unsuitable for the harsh weather and rapid climate changes of the prairies," explained Dr. Salim Silim, a biologist hired by the centre to help locate genes that might improve drought- and cold-resistance, a process that requires screening thousands of tree species.

The solution was shelterbelts, which are rows of trees and shrubs strong enough to protect the herds, land and homes.

As time went on, the centre made it their mission to not only provide trees but to research and develop species of trees that could withstand harsh prairie winters and sweltering summers.

"The Shelterbelt Centre took on the great responsibility of developing trees that are suitable here," Silim noted.

"Trees that we have developed and are researching at this time adapt well to our current climate. As the temperature rises, other factors come into play, such as drought, changing winter, as well as fall and spring conditions in which the temperature is very cold then very warm," he said.

(more)

"A huge challenge that we are meeting right now is the fast rate of change in the environment, which will result in poor performance, poor growth and eventually the death of many trees."

The work the Shelterbelt Centre is doing to adapt trees to the effects of climate change includes characterizing the traits that help trees and shrubs survive the unpredictable fall and spring conditions. There are several traits that must be present in trees and shrubs in order for them to survive these climate changes.

"The ability for trees and shrubs to be dormant early, to respond to temperature very quickly, and to stop growth when it warms up very quickly are important determinates of the trees' survival," Silim stated.

The Shelterbelt Centre essentially identifies the traits that lead to adaptability, and then uses the traits to screen different populations of trees from different areas. The next step is to use these traits to select the species of trees that will be suitable for future prairie weather conditions.

"Different populations result from trees that have grown in different micro-environments and have adapted to environments differently. Some are much more adaptable than others, depending on where they have been growing for hundreds of years," Silim said.

- 30 -

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